

Groupwork Reminders (Summary of Designing Groupwork by E. Cohen, Ch. 4)

Procedural Roles

- The purpose of roles is to ensure a high quality discussion and a group product that are on track and on time.
- Roles relate to **how** the work gets done; **intellectual roles are inappropriate**. (Intellectual roles may be: the mathematician, the reader, the scientist). If reading and math are critical to the task, then everyone in the group should be engaged in these skills and processes.
- Procedural roles must be appropriate to the task and to the number of group members.
- **Every** group member must have a procedural role - all the stuff in all hands.
- The procedural role is for the student to make sure that the assigned task gets done, not necessarily that the student do it alone. (e.g. the note taker makes sure everyone has notes).

Teacher Facilitation Tips for Successful Group Roles:

1. Assign roles; if you let the group choose their own roles, they will tend to give whatever they perceive as the most desirable and powerful role to the person with the highest status.
2. Make role assignments public knowledge both visually and verbally (consider procedural role name tags that refer to the student's procedural role to the group).
3. Provide a written "job description" for each role.
4. Make sure everyone knows what each role is supposed to do.
5. Provide students opportunities to learn each of the roles in low stakes environments.
6. Think carefully about assigning facilitation roles, especially as students are learning groupwork. In particular, the facilitator should be assigned thoughtfully because it is a high status role. This can raise a person's status if low status, but can also cause anxiety if the person does not have practice in this role. This role can also increase a high status student's status. Every student, over time, should be assigned the role of facilitator.
7. Hold students accountable for their procedural roles.
8. Once students have practice and skills with procedural roles, make sure to rotate roles in a visible way, so everyone gets a chance.

Possible Group Roles

- **Discussion Leader.** The **discussion leader** works to keep the group on track. He or she is charged with ensuring full participation from all team members, and helps to moderate individuals who may try to dominate the group discussion. Typical comments from the discussion leader may include the following:
 - "Let's focus on the problem."
 - "Should we move on to the next question?"
 - "John, what do you think about this issue?"
- **Recorder/Record Keeper.** The **recorder** keeps track of unresolved issues, records group strategies, maintains archives of all work sheets and electronic files, and convenes the group outside of class as necessary. You'll frequently hear the recorder say things like this:
 - "Did we get all of the learning issues down?"
 - "Is this the diagram we want to use?"
 - "I have a copy of our files. I also posted them to our File Exchange section in Blackboard. That way, everyone in the group will have access to the files we created today."

- Equity Manager.** The **equity manager** attempts to keep the channels of communication open so that ALL group members are encouraged to participate throughout the activity. If any member is not participating, the equity manager asks questions to get that member involved. The equity manager makes sure that no one takes over, and no one is left out. The equity manager tends to make comments like this:
 - o "We haven't hear from Perry, yet. Perry, what do you think about... ?"
 - o "Does everyone support this choice?"
 - o "Who hasn't had a chance to share, yet?"
- Reporter .** The **reporter** assembles the draft of the group's solution for the project, solicits feedback from all group members, incorporates agreed-upon changes, and submits the project. The reporter is often heard uttering these phrases:
 - o "Is everyone in agreement with this document?"
 - o "Everyone needs to review this draft and get back to me with comments before Wednesday."
- Accuracy Coach.** The **accuracy coach** probes for group understanding and makes sure that all team members are familiar with all aspects of the project. He or she locates valid, legitimate resources, and brings them to class if necessary. The accuracy coach may also review the entire project for accuracy and completeness, although all team members typically have some responsibility for that activity. You'll probably hear the accuracy coach say things like this:
 - o "Where did you find that information?"
 - o "Are we all clear about the underlying logic behind this formula?"
 - o "Does the text have information we might be able to use as we prepare our response to this problem?"
 - o "Is this calculation correct?"
 - o "Did we investigate all of the learning issues on our list?"
- Skeptic/Questioner.** The **skeptic** challenges group consensus, and poses alternative solutions or different ways to think about the problem. The skeptic/questioner could have the limitation of being the only person from the group who can ask the teacher a question. The skeptic may make these kinds of comments:
 - o "I'm not sure we're on the right track."
 - o "Should we consider other ideas?"
 - o "Are we sure this is the only way to look at this issue?"
 - o "What if the underlying conditions change? Will our solution still work, or should we look at ways to make our solution more flexible?"
- Timekeeper.** The **timekeeper** makes sure the group stays on schedule – for the current group meeting and for the project as a whole. You'll hear the timekeeper say things like this:
 - o "We only have ten minutes left in this class period. Are we ready to write our meeting summary for today?"
 - o "The project is due in four days. We should have our final draft ready by noon tomorrow. That way, everyone can review it and we'll have time to incorporate changes before we turn it in."
- Reflector/Summarizer .** Reflection is a very important part of the PBL process. When you take the time to reflect on what you've done, you tend to come up with ways to improve how your group operates from class to class and from project to project. When group operations improve, the quality of the final project submissions tends to improve as well. The **reflector/summarizer** spearheads the reflection process. He or she summarizes the progress of the group at various stages of the project. This helps ensure that all team

members are on the "same page," and provides a vehicle through which team members can make recommendations for improvements. The reflector/summarizer also works with the **accuracy coach** to check for group understanding. The reflector/summarizer tends to make comments like this:

- "Here's where I think we are right now. Joe, what do you think?"
 - "Maria, you mentioned that we need to come up with a better review process for our final draft than the process we followed on the last project. We should discuss this as a team before we get too far along in this next project."
 - "Wow – I can't believe this class period is almost over! Let's talk about what we accomplished today."
 - "We're at the mid-point of our project. Here's what we've finished so far. Sue, does this agree with your records of our progress to date?"
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- **Initiator/Contributor.** When an individual proposes new ideas or changed ways of doing things relating to the group's problem or goals, he is playing the role of **initiator/contributor**. The **initiator/contributor** role can be summarized in the term "idea person." Related to the problem-solving sequence, the **initiator/contributor** plays a crucial role at the stage of determining alternative solutions and selecting the best alternative. The initiator/contributor tends to make comments like this:
 - "Perhaps we should consider an alternative strategy."
 - "What other ideas have we not considered, yet?"
 - "What if we... ?"
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- **Information Seeker.** The **information seeker** asks for clarification of suggestions. He or she seeks authoritative information and facts pertinent to the problem being discussed. This role is important as the group attempts to analyze the situation and select the best alternative solution. The information seeker tends to make comments like this:
 - "What are the pros and cons of this possible idea?"
 - "What I think our group needs to know about this, is..."
 - "How can we explain or justify this suggestion?"
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- **Orienter.** The **orienter** defines the position of the group relative to their goals. He or she also indicates where the group has gotten off the path. This role is particularly important in directing the group toward the eventual solution of a problem. This person is often a good leader for the group.
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- **Summarizer.** The **summarizer** sums up the main ideas at any given time in the group process. Teachers can request that the summarizer perform their role every so often or call out during the process, "Time for the summarizer." This helps everyone in the group keep up to speed with what the direction of the group is, and also can help clarify misunderstandings if not all group members are on the same page. The summarizer tends to make comments like this:
 - "We have suggested three major ideas, so far. They are... "
 - "Our group seems solid about our plan to.... , but we are still deciding about... "
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- **Procedural Technician or Materials Manager.** The **procedural technician** helps the group by taking care of seating arrangements, equipment, distribution of materials, gathering of supplies, etc. This person is the go-getter that supports the group with physical needs.
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- **Encourager.** The **encourager** offers praise and commends group members. He or she encourages group members to contribute ideas and thanks them for their participation. The goal of the encourager is to make other group members feel that their contributions are worthwhile. The encourager tends to make comments like this:
 - "That is a good idea. Would you explain it a little more?"

- “Thanks for your efforts and thoughtful ideas.”
- **Harmonizer.** The **harmonizer** attempts to resolve conflict between members. He or she tries to encourage group members to clarify their ideas and prevent miscommunication.

References:

† Adapted from Allen, D. A., Duch, B.J., and Groh, S. E. (2001). Strategies for using groups. In B.J. Duch, S.E. Groh, & D.E. Allen (Eds.), *The Power of Problem-Based Learning* (pp. 59-68). Sterling, VA : Stylus Publishing and Watson, George H. Silicon, Circuits, and the Digital Revolution (SCEN 103). 11-Feb-2000 . Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Delaware . Retrieved 31-May-2005.
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